



The Medi-Cal Managed Care Project: Increasing Awareness about Medi-Cal Managed Care and Promoting Voluntary Enrollment for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

Health Research for Action

Health Research for Action (HRA), formerly the Center for Community Wellness, is a center in the UC Berkeley School of Public Health. HRA's mission is to conduct research and translate the findings into products, programs, and policies that reduce health disparities and create healthier, more empowered communities. HRA's work is conducted in partnership with the people living in these communities.

The Medi-Cal Managed Care Project

The issue: Medi-Cal provides health care services to 6.6 million Californians, or approximately 20% of the state's population. Seniors and persons with disabilities (SPD) comprise 25% of all Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

There are two delivery systems for Medi-Cal: fee-for-service in all 58 counties and managed care, currently in 22 counties. Most SPD (over 81%) in California receive care through fee-for-service Medi-Cal. In counties where managed care enrollment is optional for SPD, only 10% voluntarily enroll in it.

Currently, there is little information for seniors and persons with disabilities to inform their choice of Medi-Cal delivery systems. Yet, there is some evidence that Medi-Cal managed care improves the quality and the access of health care for these populations. Medi-Cal managed care provides coordination of health care services and guarantees access to primary care providers. This may be especially important for elderly and disabled populations, who typically have two or more chronic health conditions and require more complex treatments, medications, and hospitalizations than other beneficiaries. Medi-Cal managed care also may offer improved access, from a disability, as well as a cultural and linguistic perspective.*

The partnership: The California Department of Health Services is partnering with HRA to conduct formative research to understand how seniors and persons with disabilities learn about their Medi-Cal delivery options and make decisions about these options and to develop and test improved communication tools for these groups. The ultimate goals of the project are to increase awareness about Medi-Cal managed care and promote voluntary enrollment.

The project: This pilot project will focus on English-, Spanish-, and Chinese-speaking seniors and persons with disabilities in Alameda, Riverside, and Sacramento counties. The project objectives are to:

1. Conduct formative research to learn how seniors and persons with disabilities make health care decisions and assess barriers to enrollment in managed care;
2. Develop and test communication tools to increase knowledge of the differences between managed care and fee-for-service Medi-Cal, highlighting issues that a senior or a person with a disability may need to consider in their decision-making process; and,
3. Develop additional interventions that empower seniors and persons with disabilities to make informed decisions about Medi-Cal and reduce barriers to enrolling in Medi-Cal managed care.

*For additional information about this project, please contact
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* S. Kimberly Belshé, and Sandra Shewry. State of California: Medi-Cal Redesign, 2005.